

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 005207

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/31/2015

TAGS: [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [CO](#) [FARC](#)

SUBJECT: PLAN PATRIOTA PHASE 2B UPDATE

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons
1.5 (b) and (d)

Summary

11. (C) General Fracica took control of the Joint Task Force Omega (JTF-O), responsible for carrying out Plan Patriota's Phase 2B in Southeastern Colombia, in December 2004. Progress in the area of operations was slow in early 2005; changes by Fracica prompted some limited advancements but progress then slowed once again as the FARC adapted to COLMIL's strategy. Fracica implemented a re-zoning of the mobile brigades in the 2B area and concentrated his forces in the southern zone in an attempt to pursue senior FARC leadership. COLMIL has improved inter-service cooperation, made good use of information from deserters, and seized significant weapons and food caches. The coming months will pose even greater challenges for the JTF-O as the FARC adapts to COLMIL operations.

Phase 2B Operations

12. (C) Plan Patriota is, in many ways, a tactical battle. The first three months following the appointment of General Fracica to the Joint Task Force Omega (JTF-O) in December 2004 saw slow progress in the Plan Patriota Phase 2B area. Fracica then implemented changes that allowed limited success before progress slowed once again as FARC forces adapted to COLMIL strategy. Fracica ordered a re-zoning of the brigades in the 2B area of operations in March 2005 to give his commanders more control of their own battlespace and the opportunity for more flexibility. Operation Cazador del Caguan in April and May 2005 moved the force structure in the 2B area of operations from the east of the Caguan River to the west by redeploying the First and Second Mobile Brigades to the area around Remolinas del Caguan. The Rapid Deployment Force (FUDRA) headquarters was moved from La Macarena to Tres Esquinas and took control of the First, Second, Sixth, and 22nd Mobile Brigades. Fracica's focus on the southern part of the area of operations was driven, in part, by a belief that a concentration of FARC senior leadership was located there. Operation Cazador del Caguan was most successful in its first two weeks, but progress slowed in the following period. In the end, the operation resulted in 29 enemy combatants killed in action, 40 wounded, and the seizure of 98 tons of food. The mid-May Operation Romeo that took place between Tres Esquinas and Larandia officially resulted in 16 enemy combatants killed in action, although unofficial reports are as high as 80.

13. (C) Under pressure from President Uribe and the High Command to produce greater results, Fracica in mid-May ordered his troops against known FARC structures or mobility corridors. His goal was to have his units actively seeking combat. In April 2005 a similar strategy targeting FARC logistical infrastructure in the Sunsilla River area produced notable success, helping to make April the month with the greatest operational results in 2005 (29 FARC killed in action, 40 FARC captured). The FUDRA is now directing all of its units--Mobile Brigades 1, 2, 6, and 22--to undertake the new objectives; the commanders in areas one and three are also planning for new operations to target known FARC structures.

Positive Developments

14. (C) Inter-service cooperation at tactical and strategic levels has improved. The Army's 4th and 6th Divisions, located north and south of the JTF-O, respectively, have provided increased support to JTF-O forces in 2005 by moving to cut off mobility corridors in support of 2B operations. The Second Colombian Air Combat Command (CACOM 2) at Apiay plans to build a joint intelligence center run by the Air Force and staffed by all services. The center will service CACOM 2, the Army's Fourth Division, and Plan Patriota Phase 2B operations. On a strategic scale, the High Command of the Armed Forces reinforced its commitment to inter-service coordination in May 2005 with the dismissal of four top generals who opposed the creation of coordinated commands.

15. (C) The Seventh and Tenth Mobile Brigades captured at least twenty combatants from the FARC's First Front using intelligence gathered from guerrilla deserters. The Armed Forces succeeded in finding significant supply caches; in mid-January, the Ninth and Tenth Mobile Brigades found the largest food and weapons cache so far, containing machine guns, uniforms, and food.

Persistent Challenges and Constraints

16. (C) The terrain in the 2B area of operations is difficult and impedes intelligence collection, tactical surprise, and support for the 15,500 troops in the area. Leishmaniasis continues to have a major impact as hundreds of soldiers, and even critical mine-sniffing dogs, contract the disease. COLMIL forces are getting little intelligence from the 2B area, which is making it difficult to know where the enemy is. FARC three-man groups track and report on COLMIL movements--plus the large size of JTF-O force units--making it difficult to achieve tactical surprise. As a consequence, COLMIL is forced to expend a great deal of effort on denial and deception activities. Finally, air support to operations in the area continues to be a problem. By reallocating priorities to the JTF-O area, Minister of Defense Uribe and the military high command increased contract air hours for rotary wing support from 85 to 100 hours per month. Fracica wants to further increase contract air hours in the JTF-O area of operations to 120 hours per month, but other programs will be impacted if this occurs. COLMIL receives an additional 75 hours per month in contracted fixed wing support; the Colombian Airforce also provides another 80 hours per month of rotary wing support and 140 hours per month of fixed wing support. Even this, however, is insufficient to support a 15,500 troop operation.

An Uphill Battle

17. (C) Because the FARC have adapted to COLMIL offensive operations, JTF-O forces will have to make changes in order to go beyond what former JTF-O Commander General Castellanos was able to achieve. It has become a war of attrition in which the most accessible camps and supplies caches already have been neutralized. Moreover, the coming rainy season lasts until November.

18. (C) Fracica expects this phase of Plan Patriota to conclude by the end of 2005, when the JTF-O will turn the mission over to the Fourth and Sixth Army Divisions.

WOOD